



PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

STUDENT FEEDBACK IN EVERGREEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

ABOUT EVERGREEN

Nestled in the heart of Silicon Valley in San Jose, Evergreen Elementary School District (EESD) serves nearly 11,000 students across 18 schools. In the words of Superintendent Katherine Gomez, "Our vision is that our schools are safe, caring, and nurturing places for students where they can achieve academically, socially, and emotionally."

As part of this vision, YouthTruth helps EESD gather and act on feedback from students about their experiences of schools. Through YouthTruth's valid and reliable surveys, EESD measures what matters most to driving student achievement and ensuring that students feel safe, engaged, and supported.

LISTENING TO STUDENTS

"When I first heard about YouthTruth, I loved it." said Gomez. "Student voices are an important piece of the puzzle of understanding schools – asking for their feedback makes so much sense."

EESD staff have found their YouthTruth reports – which include their students' feedback in a nationally comparative context and also contain open-ended comments from students – to be a powerful tool. Equipped with this data, district leaders are able to more deeply understand student experiences, fueling improvements both at individual schools and district-wide.

"An essential part of educating students is truly understanding their needs, and there's nothing more effective in achieving that than with solid data," says Superintendent Gomez. "YouthTruth has helped us get the feedback we need in students' own words, which enables us to more precisely identify programs that will better support them."

YouthTruth

— STUDENT SURVEY —

A NATIONAL NONPROFIT



Evergreen
School District

EVERGREEN AT A GLANCE

Location

San Jose, California

Schools

15 elementary schools
3 middle schools

Demographics

11,000 students
88% students of color
29% FRPL
23% English Language Learners

Superintendent

Katherine Gomez

YOUTHTRUTH & EVERGREEN SCHOOL DISTRICT

PILOTING YOUTHTRUTH

Katherine Smith Elementary pilots YouthTruth student surveys.

2013-14

FAMILY & STAFF SURVEYS

EESD adds YouthTruth's new family and staff surveys.

2015-16

LOCAL CONTROL AND ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN (LCAP)

EESD includes YouthTruth student and stakeholder feedback as part of their LCAP metrics.

2017-18

DISTRICT-WIDE ADOPTION

All schools in EESD survey with YouthTruth student surveys.

2014-15

ADDITIONAL LANGUAGES

EESD is the first district to implement Vietnamese language translation of the family survey.

2016-17

CALIFORNIA DASHBOARD

EESD includes YouthTruth feedback as part of their California Dashboard narrative for Priorities 3 and 6 (Parent Engagement and School Climate).

2018-19

LAURELWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Student Engagement and School Culture

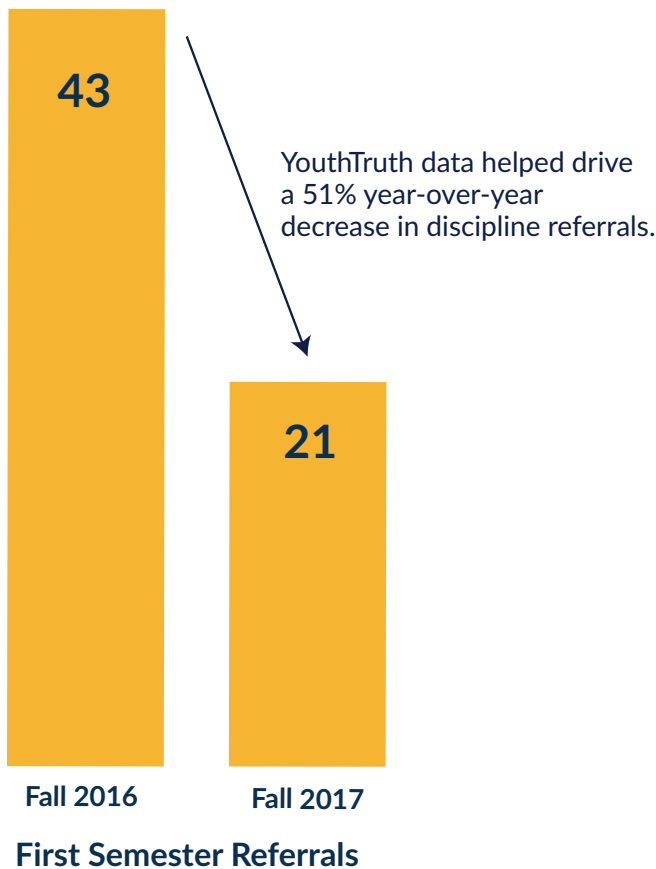
Dr. Hong Nguyen, principal of Laurelwood Elementary, believes students are important members of the school community. “Our students are a huge part of our school – and they’re a stakeholder that we sometimes tend to forget,” says Dr. Nguyen. “They’re the people we want to focus our instruction and positive school culture building around. Student voice is important.”



Based on YouthTruth data, Laurelwood Elementary leaders identified **student engagement** and **classroom culture** as two specific areas to prioritize. With these areas as their focus, the school implemented a positive behavioral interventions and support (PBIS) system that emphasizes clear expectations and consistent positive reinforcement.

Lion Character Cards are one tool that are used for positive reinforcement. Students earn these cards by embodying the schoolwide values of being responsible, safe, and respectful. Each Friday, students who have collected Lion Character Cards visit with the principal to receive a prize.

By prioritizing student engagement and school culture and rolling out the PBIS system, the campus successfully decreased discipline referrals. The early impact of the PBIS initiative is clear – in the first semester of the 2017-18 school year, discipline referrals went down 51 percent compared to the first semester of the previous academic school year.



PBIS AT LAURELWOOD

What is PBIS?
PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports) is a way for schools to encourage good behavior with a focus on prevention, not punishment. With PBIS at Laurelwood Elementary, students learn about behavior just as they learn about other subjects like math or science.

How does it work?
Educators can use PBIS as a structure for

- 1) Organizing evidence-based practices
- 2) Improving their implementation of those practices
- 3) Maximizing academic and social behavior outcomes for students

What are Laurelwood Elementary's school-wide rules?
Laurelwood emphasizes the school-wide rules of being responsible, safe, and respectful. In each location of the school, students practice these rules, which help to decrease disciplinary actions and allows for learning to take place.

“They’re the ones we want to focus our instruction and positive school culture building around. Student voice is important.”



KATHERINE SMITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Social-Emotional Learning

Aaron Brengard, principal of Katherine Smith Elementary, has gathered student feedback through YouthTruth surveys since 2013. “Before partnering with YouthTruth, I really didn’t have good ways to capture what students thought or felt about what was going on – they were a missing stakeholder,” says Brengard. “This survey gave me the opportunity to gather those voices and get real data on how students were feeling about their experience in school.”



Central to Brengard’s leadership beliefs is an emphasis on regularly collecting student feedback. “So often when we talk about student voice, we’re talking about high school students who can really clearly articulate why their voices matter,” says Brengard. “Listening to younger students is just as important – their voices matter, and we need to be listening to our kids.”

By collecting student voice annually through YouthTruth surveys, Brengard and the Katherine Smith team get a comprehensive look at how students are feeling each year – and then act on that feedback.

One way the team at Katherine Smith has made changes based on student feedback data is by honing in on **social-emotional learning** (SEL). The SEL leadership team at Katherine Smith use student feedback data to inform their work and track the impact of SEL initiatives. Based on YouthTruth results, the team developed activities to help teachers engage with students around the data. Through the activities, teachers aim to understand *why* students felt positively in certain areas and *where* students feel their school experience can improve.

One of these activities is a conversation circle prompt called “The Short List”. This prompt lays out questions for teachers to engage and support students both academically and behaviorally. These prompts help teachers connect with their students on a regular basis on the topics highlighted in their YouthTruth data, such as academic relevance, deepening student/teacher relationships, and classroom culture.

CIRCLE TOPICS: THE SHORT LIST

Check In



- How are you feeling today? What is one thing I can do to help you be successful today?
- What makes you happy at home? What’s something that worries/troubles you at home?
- What do you like about our class? What’s one thing you would change?
- What’s your goal for not wasting time today?

Academic



- How can what we learned be used at home in some other way? I learned ____ today so that ____.
- What mistake have you made and what did you learn from it? Did anyone help you?
- Explain a strategy you use to . . .
- Present a topic and ask if they agree or disagree and explain why

Behavior



- What is one thing you need help with?
- What is _____ (i.e. bullying)? What can we do to make sure this doesn’t happen again?
- How can we make our transitions smooth?
- What can you do to support a student who is struggling to stay focused?

Check Out



- How was your day today? What are you looking forward to tomorrow?
- What’s one thing you can do better tomorrow?
- I was most confused by . . .
- What was the most important thing you learned today?

EVERGREEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Instructional Methods

For Stephen Sweeney, principal of Evergreen Elementary, the importance of listening to student voice speaks directly to his own core leadership values. Just as he believes it is important for teachers to provide feedback to school leadership, he also believes that students should have the opportunity for their voices to be heard.

YouthTruth data has helped Sweeney and the Evergreen Elementary team ground their decision-making toward specific improvements. “You’re not just guessing in the dark,” says Sweeney. “This survey gives us hard data, and it’s directly from the students – it’s what they’re experiencing and saying.”



When Evergreen Elementary got their first year of YouthTruth data back in 2015, there were a lot of bright spots – like **classroom culture**, where they ranked in the 91st percentile compared to other schools nationally. But with this baseline data, school leaders also identified areas for growth. In particular, they wanted to focus on **instructional methods**, where they ranked in the bottom quartile.

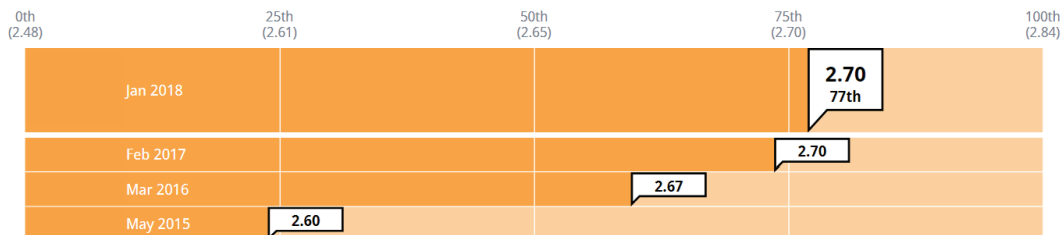
Just as Evergreen Elementary was starting to gather student feedback, they were also beginning the implementation of another program: a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) program. The school is now home to a STEAM Lab, also known as an Innovation Station.



The lab is a place where students conduct experiments and simulations in a controlled environment while also having the freedom to be self-directed. Students get to make decisions about where and how they work on projects in the STEAM Lab. With this new format, teachers use instructional methods that emphasize student voice and choice. YouthTruth data affirms that the instructional changes are working.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

Describes the degree to which teachers use techniques that probe for absorption and understanding, providing effective support to students when needed.



“This survey gives us hard data, and it’s directly from students - it’s what they’re experiencing.”



MENTAL HEALTH COMMITTEE

Another way EESD has incorporated student voice into district-level decision-making is through the district Mental Health Committee, which specifically focuses on supports and interventions for students' mental health. The committee includes a variety of stakeholders, including: school psychologists, social workers, counselors, district staff, a community mental health representative, parents, teachers, and students.

Students on the committee provide their personal perspectives and add additional context to the data from their YouthTruth results. Students have a unique opportunity to engage in discussion about their mental health experiences and provide recommendations on how to improve the school experience, such as the need for training for teachers on how to identify and recommend mental health services. Each year, the students on the committee present the committee's plans to the school board as well — engaging with all levels of the district decision-making system, and having their voices heard.

As part of the district's three-year goal to enhance the social-emotional well-being of students, teachers, and staff, the district is particularly focusing on the **relationships between teachers and students**. District leaders and Mental Health Committee members recognize that teacher-student relationships are crucial for creating a safe, caring classroom culture that is foundational for academic success. YouthTruth data helps capture and measure student experiences — and district leaders are seeing positive results.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- The [Measures of Effective Teaching](#) study found that students survey results are predictive of student achievement and that "student surveys produce more consistent results than classroom observations or achievement gain measures."
- A research synthesis from the [American Educational Research Association](#) found that by promoting a positive school climate, schools can allow greater equality in educational opportunities, decrease socioeconomic inequalities, and enable more social mobility for students.
- The [John W. Gardner Center at Stanford University](#) found that students' motivational beliefs are closely related to their achievement, and classroom practices that create a caring learning environment improve student motivation.



THREE YEAR GOAL:

Enhance the social-emotional well-being of students, teachers, and staff.

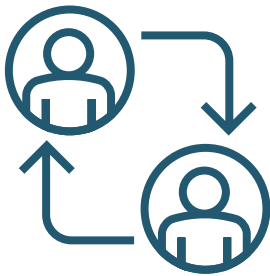
✓ *Work with students and staff to strengthen relationships by 5% as measured by YouthTruth survey.*

✓ *Develop and recommend a plan to Cabinet to pilot a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) at Katherine Smith Elementary and Chaboya Middle School in 2018-19.*

✓ *Increase teacher ability to identify and recommend mental health services for their students as measured by a pre/post teacher assessment, and report to Cabinet.*

FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

At a district level, Evergreen School District has also made student feedback an important component of their continuous improvement process. Student voices are included in their local accountability planning, with a focus on tracking changes in student perceptions year-over-year. In the words of Superintendent Gomez, “As long as I’ve been in education, I have believed that a child should feel supported and engaged at their school. YouthTruth has been a great way for us to hear directly from the students, and understand what’s working for them.”



In EESD’s [Local Control and Accountability Plan](#), YouthTruth survey data on student engagement is included as a metric under their goals of retaining and attracting students, attracting and retaining teachers and staff, and providing equitable education resources and facilities. The district outlines specific goals around how they want to rank compared to other schools nationally, providing a vision as well as indicators of success for topics that can often seem difficult to measure. By combining large, overarching goals – such as retention and equitable resources – with specific, measurable feedback from students, Evergreen is ensuring that students stay at the center of their mission and vision.

EVERGREEN LCAP GOALS

Retain existing students and attract new students to the District.

Measure social-emotional learning and school-climate via YouthTruth survey.

Relationships

Relevance

Classroom Culture

Provide equitable education resources and facilities.

Measure social-emotional learning and school-climate via YouthTruth survey.

Instructional Methods

Relevance

Classroom Culture

Attract and retain teachers and staff, especially those with specialized credentials.

Measure school climate via YouthTruth survey.

Rigor

Student Engagement

Instructional Methods



ABOUT KATHY GOMEZ

Superintendent, Evergreen School District

Passionate about education innovation and positive school culture, Kathy Gomez has served as Superintendent of Evergreen School District since 2011. Prior to becoming Superintendent, she served in the district as a teacher, assistant principal, and Director of Educational Services.

She received her Bachelors degree in Business Administration as well as her teaching credential and Masters degree in Education Admsintration from San Jose State University



ABOUT GARY KISHIMOTO

Director of Pupil Services, Evergreen School District

Gary Kishimoto has worked in Evergreen School District for the last 20 years, working in a variety of capacities ranging from school psychologist to Director of Pupil Services.

He recieved his Bachelors degree in Psychology from California State University, Northridge, and a Masters in School Psychology from San Jose University.



ABOUT HONG NGUYEN

Principal, Laurelwood Elementary

Dr. Hong Nguyen has worked in San Jose, CA schools for the past nine years, taking on numerous leadership positions to gain management and instructional experiences. She is currently in her third year as principal of Laurelwood Elementary.

She received her Bachelors degree in American Studies with a minor in Education from the University of California, Berkeley, as well as her Multiple-Subject Teaching Credential and Master of Arts in Education from the University of California, Davis. In 2015, she completed her Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership from Fielding Graduate University.



ABOUT AARON BRENGARD

Principal, Katherine Smith Elementary

Aaron Brengard is the principal of Katherine Smith Elementary, a New Tech Network School, a No Excuses University School, a partner with the Buck Insitute for Education, and had been named a Partnership for 21st Century Skills Exemplar. Brengard is a strong advocate for bringing innovative learning approaches to underserved communities.



ABOUT STEPHEN SWEENEY

Principal, Evergreen Elementary School

Stephen Sweeney has been the principal of Evergreen Elementary School, a 2016 National Blue Ribbon School and a 2012 California Distinguished School, for the past eight years. Prior to becoming principal, he was an assistant principal, and a music, art appreciation, and science teacher.

He received his teaching credential from Concordia University, Irvine, and a Masters in Educational Leadership from San Jose State University. He earned his admsintrative credential from Santa Clara University.

ABOUT YOUTHTRUTH

YouthTruth is a national nonprofit that harnesses student and stakeholder perceptions to help educators accelerate improvements. Through validated survey instruments and tailored advisory services, YouthTruth partners with schools, districts, states, and educational organizations to enhance learning for all students. For a tour of our interactive, online reports, sign up to join a webinar here: www.youthtruthsurvey.org/get-started/#webinar.

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